

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
19 June 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Status Report on Soviet Activity in Yemen

1. The personal observation in Yemen on 15 June by a [redacted] of a "large Soviet tent encampment" and of Soviets "preparing a hard surface runway" tends to confirm that many of the recently arrived Soviet personnel are in fact airfield construction workers. The construction site, just north of Sana, is al-Raudha Airfield where an 11,500-foot runway--suitable for use by the largest jets--is being constructed. [redacted]

25X1 USAF

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2. The size of the Soviet airfield construction group is not abnormal given conditions in Yemen. The bloc had found, during earlier aid efforts in Yemen, it was unable to depend on local workers--untrained, [redacted]--even for manned labor and consequently introduced large numbers of bloc laborers to perform basic construction activities. At one time, in 1960-61 Communist China had about 1,000 laborers performing the relatively uncomplicated work of road construction in Yemen.

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3. [redacted]

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[redacted] At present Yemen has only a few Soviet propeller-driven trainer aircraft and about 40 helicopters. It also has some ground forces equipment, including 30 medium

USAF review(s) completed.

State Dept. review completed

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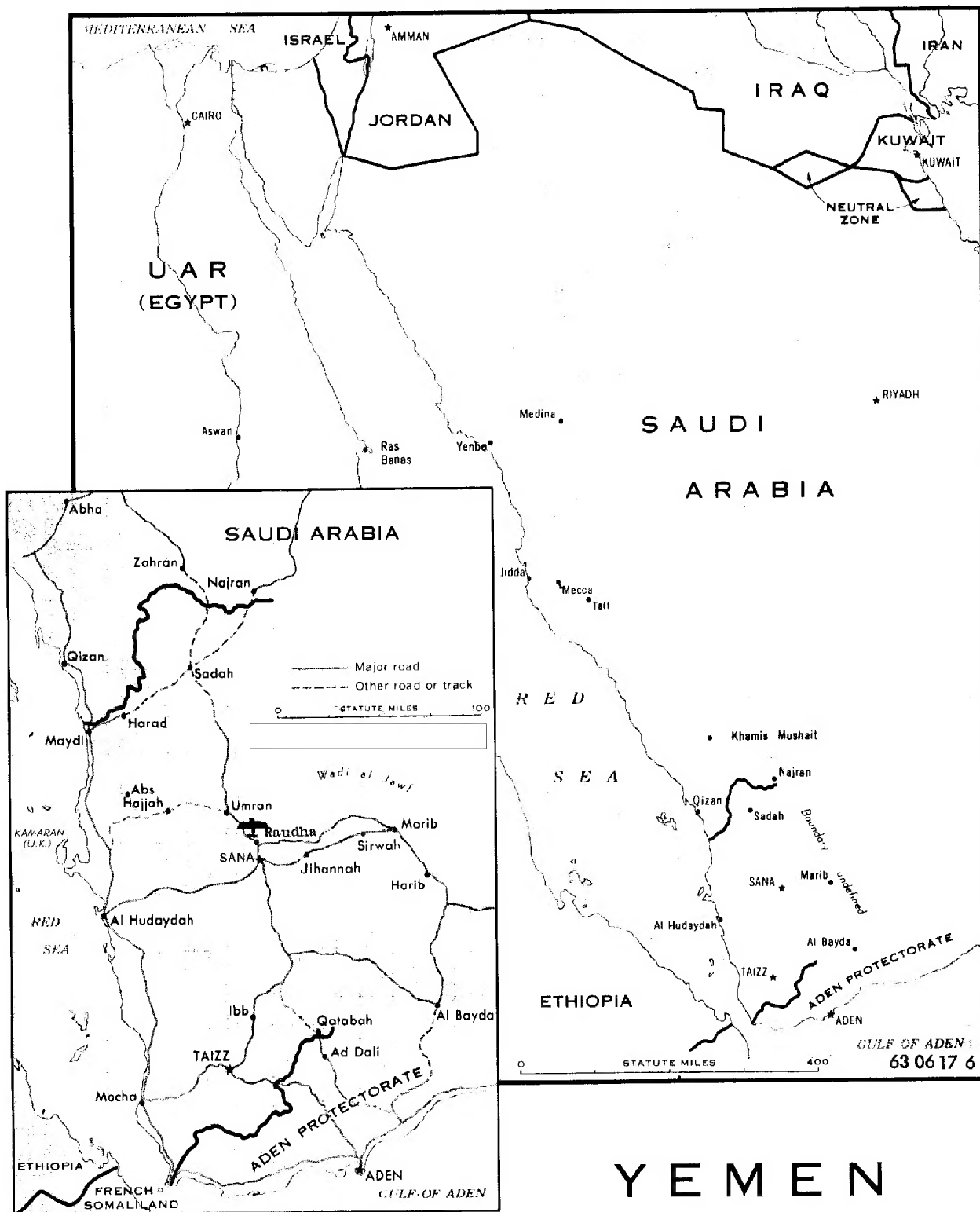
tanks, about 400 pieces of artillery, and 100 armored personnel carriers.

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5. We still do not have any evidence that the Soviets have requested military facilities or bases under their control in Yemen. The Soviets apparently intend to enlarge their presence and influence. They are likely to request civil air rights to be used in connection with their penetration of Africa. However, there are important limiting factors on the range of the USSR's ambitions. The unstable political situation in Yemen does not make it a particularly attractive target for large-scale Soviet involvement. The primitive economic structure of the country is also an inhibiting factor. An even more important inhibiting factor is Moscow's desire to avoid antagonizing Nasir unless the benefits were clearly of major importance. In view of the heavy Egyptian commitment in protecting and securing the revolutionary regime against the royalists and Saudis, a Soviet attempt to establish a dominant influence in Yemen's affairs would inevitably incur Nasir's hostility.

6. We continue to think that the current phase of Soviet activity in Yemen stems from Moscow's usual attempts to take advantage of any new opportunities for extending its influence. Soviet assistance to the revolutionary regime is part of the USSR's general policy of supporting Arab nationalist regimes with the long-range aim of reducing Western influence and encouraging regional instability, which, the Soviets hope, will in turn provide other increasingly attractive targets for exploitation.



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